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SUBJECT: MFA ON GAZA, HAMAS, AND RECENT DEMONSTRATIONS

REF: A. CAIRO 2429
 B. CAIRO 2476

Classified By: MINISTER-COUNSELOR WILLIAM R. STEWART
REASONS: 1.4 (B) and (D)

¶11. (C) Summary. MFA Cabinet Advisor for Israel-Palestinian Affairs Ahmed Hamshari told us December 15 that Egyptian embassies worldwide had recently faced demonstrations criticizing the GOE over the humanitarian situation in Gaza. The protests appear to be in response to blockage of Hamas-sponsored Haj pilgrims in Gaza, and increased Egyptian pressure on Hamas, according to Hamshari. End summary.

¶12. (C) Hamshari said that recent demonstrations in front of several Egyptian embassies were coordinated. The Egyptian ambassadors in Malaysia and Ankara received identical letters protesting Egyptian "inattention" to Palestinians in Gaza, for example. In addition, identical leaflets were distributed around embassies in Dublin and Athens, according to Hamshari. He confirmed that, contrary to media reports, the Egyptians did not recall their diplomats from Tehran in response to a recent demonstration at the Egyptian embassy there, but rather convoked the Iranian Charge d'Affaires in Cairo to protest. Hamshari said that the editor of Iranian newspaper Kayhan had recently praised Khaled Islambouli (Sadat's assassin) as a "martyr," and called for others to "follow his example," which Hamshari interpreted to mean the assassination of President Mubarak. He noted that the Egyptian Presidency had sent the MFA an internal memo on the Kayhan editorial.

¶13. (C) Hamshari assessed that the demonstrations are driven by two main factors. First, the denial by Saudi Arabia of visas for Hamas-sponsored Haj pilgrims from Gaza had cut off a major source of Hamas financing. According to Hamshari, Hamas-affiliated Haj pilgrims have rendezvoused with Iranian operatives in Mecca to receive cash and guidance "for years."

In retaliation for this year's denial of visas, Hamas had blocked approximately 3100 Fatah-sponsored Haj pilgrims (with valid Saudi visas) from leaving Gaza. Hamshari expressed frustration that Egypt has been unable to "build a public case against Hamas" for preventing these 3100 pilgrims from traveling, and claimed that Hamas had broken the hands of 12 Gazans who had attempted to enter Egypt en route Saudi Arabia to make the Haj.

¶14. (C) The second factor driving the demonstrations is the state of the intra-Palestinian dialogue, Hamshari said. Hamas was clearly in a corner after pulling out of the Egypt-sponsored November 10 meeting in Cairo. He believes that in retaliation for increased Egyptian pressure on Hamas, Muslim Brotherhood affiliates had coordinated recent demonstrations in Egypt and at Egyptian embassies. Hamshari also claimed that Hamas leader Zahar referenced the late Sheikh Ahmed Yassin's call for "the liberation of Cairo" at a recent sermon in Gaza (NFI).

¶15. (C) Hamshari said the longer term worry is that Hamas will

continue to ascend, and that this will buoy the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and the Islamic Action Front in Jordan. All of which will be to the detriment of the Egyptian-Israeli bilateral relationship, he argued. Hamshari suggested the incoming administration focus on containing Hamas, and helping to manage Egypt's relationship with Israel.

¶6. (SBU) Bio note: Ahmed Hamshari is the newly appointed Cabinet Advisor for Israel-Palestinian Affairs, replacing Ahmed Hafez, who recently transferred to the Egyptian Embassy in Washington. He reports through MFA Senior Advisor Hossam Zaki to FM Aboul Gheit. Hamshari served in Gaza from 2002-2007, and studied in London for one year before returning to the MFA.

SCOBED